

N. Conway inn makes room for the adventurous

By Ellen Albanese

GLOBE STAFF

NORTH CONWAY, N.H. — At Adventure Suites you can sleep in a treehouse, a cave, even a giant oyster shell. You can

Checking In practice your golf swing on a putting green in your room or show a movie on a 10-foot projection screen with surround sound. If motorcycles are more your style, you can drive your Harley into a suite equipped with a seven-person hot tub and a wet bar.

Pet-friendly Adventure Suites opened five years ago on the site of the former Presidential Inn. The 16 themed rooms sprang from the imagination of owner Kathy Brassill, who said conjuring up ideas is easy, but making them happen is the hard part. "Every room is a piece of artwork," Brassill said, adding that it takes up to a year to build and accessorize one room.

The exterior of the whimsical lodging is a facade depicting a traditional 19th-century New England village, with a barber shop, post office, bank, and train station.

Rooms on the back of the inn have terrific mountain views. Brightly colored Adirondack chairs beckon, and through coin-operated binocular stands in the yard, it's possible to see rock climbers clambering up Cathedral Ledge.

We stayed in the Victorian Spa, a large, extravagantly decorated room with gleaming mahogany, rich fabrics, marble-topped side tables, and leaded glass lamps in vibrant colors. Our comfortable, king-size, four-poster bed was awash in burgundy swags, beige lace valances, a crocheted coverlet, and an armada of accent pillows. Providing a nod to the 21st century were a 44-inch plasma TV, a gas fireplace, and a wine cooler beneath the curved bar.

After years of snickering about heart-shaped tubs, the signature feature of passé Poconos resorts, we made a startling discovery: Heart-shaped tubs are really comfortable, since they allow two people to sit side by side and stretch their legs to the other end. Our deep red tub with ornate gold-tone faucets and leaded glass windows above had underwater lights

and powerful jets that got right to the heart of tired or sore muscles.

The bath featured a two-person steam shower in black and gray marble and a sauna.

Walls and ceiling were decorative brick, and the toilet had a wooden tank above, with an old-fashioned pull chain.

As visually arresting as the room was, however, it came up short on some comfort and convenience measures. There was no closet or any place to hang garments. There was no soap dish or shelf in the shower. The toilet was so close to the sink that once you sat down it was virtually impossible to reach the toilet paper roll jammed under your right armpit. Most egregious was the lack of comfortable seating from which to watch that massive TV. There were two high stools at the bar and a bench at the foot of the bed, none of which was a comfortable spot for watching one of the more than 600 movies the inn offers.

Breakfast was in a 1950s diner with red-and-black upholstered stools pulled up to tables on a classic black-and-white diamond-pattern floor. Fruit, bagels, muffins, and cereal were set out, but the big draw is the waffle maker. You can top them with maple syrup or strawberries and whipped cream.

On your arrival or departure, the friendly staff will give a tour of unoccupied suites. Especially popular with families are the Tree House, where kids can sleep in a tree house bedroom or "camp out" in personal tents, and the Cave, a primitive paradise with stalactites, waterfall shower, dinosaur bones, tunnel, and a cavern that will accommodate up to six small children.

The family market is growing, Brassill said, and renovation plans call for even more rooms that will provide luxury for parents and excitement for kids.

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Adventure Suites

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What we liked best: The rich woods, fabrics, and colors in our Victorian-themed room (and, yes, the heart-shaped Jacuzzi).

What we liked least: The lack of comfortable seating from which to watch the 44-inch plasma TV.

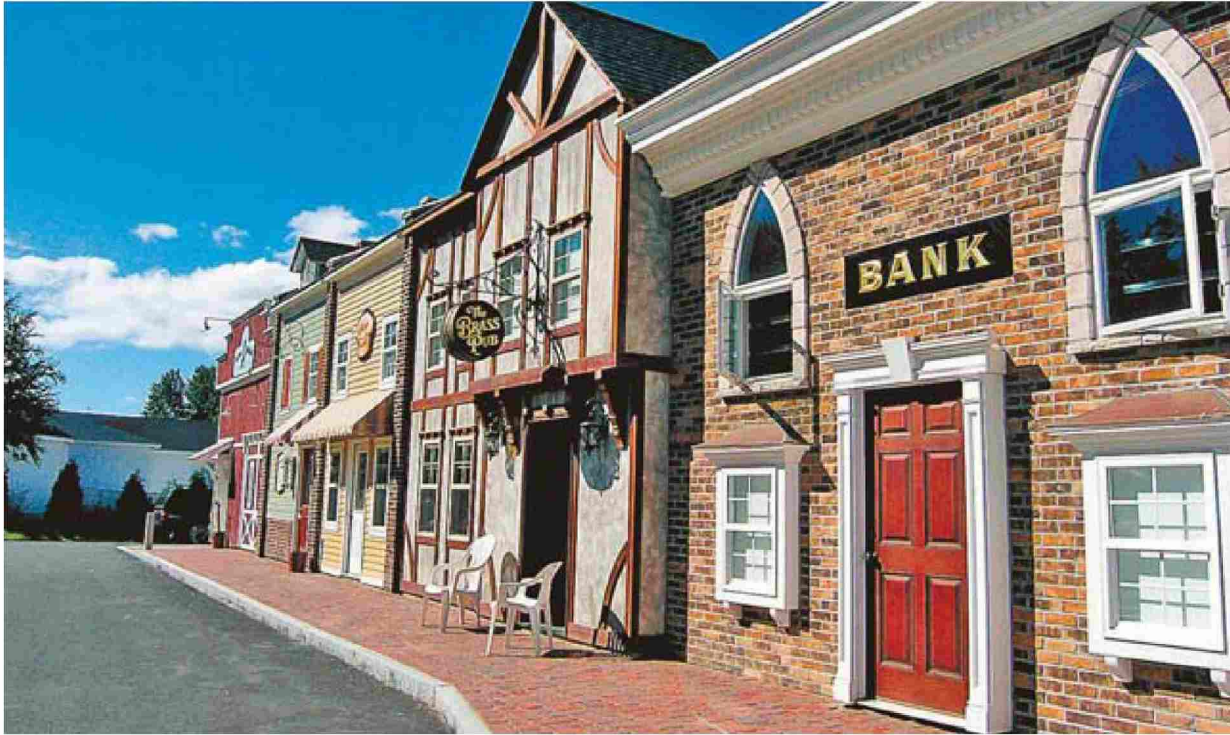
What surprised us: The lending library of some 600 movies on tape or DVD.

You know you're at Adventure Suites when . . . as you drift off in the opulent Victorian Spa, you can't help but wonder what it would be like to sleep in the Tree House . . . or the Cave . . . or the Jungle.

Rates: \$109-\$429 for two, including breakfast. The Victorian Spa was \$339 on a weekend night in September.

Directions: North Conway is 140 miles or about 2½ hours from Boston. Take Interstate 93 north to Route 1 north to I-95 north. In New Hampshire, take exit 4 to Route 16, Spaulding Turnpike. Follow Route 16 through the center of North Conway. Adventure Suites is on the left about 1½ miles beyond the center.

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PHOTOS BY ELLEN ALBANESE/GLOBE STAFF

The facade of Adventure Suites in North Conway, N.H., replicates a 19th-century village. A heart-shaped tub sits beneath leaded glass windows to welcome the bone-tired guests staying in the Victorian Spa room.

